

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
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INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
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AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L GEORGETOWN 1535

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, GY
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT PLANS TO INTRODUCE REFERENDUM BILL;
OPPOSITION TO CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT CONTINUES

REF: A. GEORGETOWN 1130, B. GEORGETOWN 1490

1. GOVERNMENT OF GUYANA(GOG) TODAY (MAY 12) INTRODUCED IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY THE REFERENDUM BILL, WHICH IS TO PROVIDE FOR THE MACHINERY FOR THE NATIONAL REFERENDUM ON AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION (REF A). THE REFERENDUM BILL PROVIDES THAT THE PROCEDURE USED IN ELECTING MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WILL BE USED FOR THE REFERENDUM. THE ASSEMBLY SESSION LASTED HALF AN HOUR AND INCLUDED THE FIRST READING OF OTHER BILLS. FURTHER ACTION ON THE REFERENDUM BILL IS SCHEDULED FOR MAY 17. THE BILL WAS INTRODUCED BY MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS MINGO. PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM DID NOT ATTEND THE SESSION.

2. ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTION, THE REFERENDUM MUST BE HELD FROM TWO TO SIX MONTHS AFTER PROPOSALS FOR SUBSTANTIVE AMENDMENTS OF THE CONSTITUTION PASS THE
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ASSEMBLY, IN THIS CASE BETWEEN JUNE 10 AND OCTOBER 10. BECAUSE THE CURRENT TERM OF THE ASSEMBLY EXPIRES JULY 25 THE REFERENDUM WILL IN ALL PROBABLY BE HELD BETWEEN JUNE 10 AND JULY 25.

3. SEVERAL GROUPS OPPOSING THE CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT AND THE REFERNDUM BILL HAVE FORMED A "COMMITTEE

IN DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY" WHOSE FIRST OVERT ACTION HAS BEEN TO ESTABLISH A VIGIL OF ABOUT FIFTEEN PERSONS WITH PLACARDS AND SIGNS IN FRONT OF THE RESIDENCE OF GOG PRESIDENT CHUNG. THE COMMITTEE INCLUDES THE MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY, THE PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP); ITS MAJOR TRADE UNION AFFILIATE, THE GUYANA AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL WORKERS' UNION (GAWU); THE WORKING PEOPLES' ALLIANCE (WPA, LED BY EUSI KWAYANA); AND OTHERS. THE RAINY VIGIL BEGAN IN LATE AFTERNOON OF MAY 11, CONTINUED QUIETLY THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT AND THE MORNING OF MAY 12, AND ENDED WITH THE OPENING OF THE ASSEMBLY IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON. (FIFTY TO SIXTY PRO-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATORS GREETED THE OPENING IN FRONT OF THE ASSEMBLY BUILDING.) THE COMMITTEE ALSO PLANS TO HOLD DEMONSTRATIONS ON SATURDAY, MAY 13, IN DOWNTOWN GEORGETOWN. THE CLERICAL AND COMMERCIAL WORKERS UNION (CCWU), WHICH SPONSORED LAST MAY 4TH'S SUCCESSFUL TWENTY-FOUR HOUR STRIKE (REF B), APPARENTLY HAS NOT JOINED THE COMMITTEE TO DATE.

4. COMMENT: OFFICIAL PUBLIC CONFIRMATION THAT THE PROPOSED REFERENDUM IS TO USE THE SAME PROCEDURES AS THOSE USED TO ELECT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN 1968 AND 1973 HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE CONCERN OF THE SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS OF THE POPULATION WHO BELIEVE THAT THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS WON THE PREVIOUS ELECTIONS BY FRAUD.
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